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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 001862

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC AND GCG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/06/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CVIS](#) [RU](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: UPDATE ON THE CURRENT RUSSIAN DIPLOMATIC
PRESENCE IN TBILISI

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Although the Russian Embassy in Georgia officially closed on September 3, 2008, a fairly sizable Russian diplomatic presence remains in Tbilisi. According to press reports, only the Russian consul, two vice-consuls, and a small technical staff have remained behind. There is actually a much larger presence, however, according to Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Chief of the Russia desk, Irakli Toronjadze (please protect). According to Toronjadze, most Russian Embassy employees flew to Moscow on a plane provided by the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations on October 2. Sixteen diplomats remain, six of whom are consular officials. Toronjadze was not certain what the names or functions of the remaining ten are or why they are still in Georgia. An undetermined number of "technical personnel" also remain. The term "technical personnel" refers to employees serving in administrative and security positions, much like Locally Engaged Staff except that these are Russian citizens. Toronjadze said the Russian DCM, Andrey Vasilyevich Smaga, would provide him a dip note with the names, positions, and details of the remaining Russian personnel within the week. Toronjadze claimed that Georgia currently has nine diplomats in Russia, including the Charge and other staff, six of whom are consular officers.

¶2. (C) According to Toronjadze, the Swiss Embassy will open a Russian interests section. The interests section will be located in the former Russian Embassy. The only difference will be that there will be a Swiss flag flying on the flag pole. Toronjadze expected to know the exact number of Russian employees working in the interests section by October ¶16. Once the Georgian MFA learns how many Russian diplomats will work in the Swiss interests section, they will reciprocally station the same number of diplomats in the Georgian Embassy in Moscow. Post will follow-up with more detailed information as it becomes available.

¶3. (C) The Russian government's current consular services in Georgia remain an enigma. Toronjadze was unaware of any consular activities, but said he would look into the matter and provide an answer as soon as he speaks with Smaga. Press reports state Georgian citizens can receive Russian visas for emergency situations and to see family members in Russia. According to press reports, the Swiss Embassy stated it will provide no consular or visa services on behalf of Russia until the end of negotiations between all sides concerned. On October 3 and again on October 6, Post tried calling the former Russian Embassy's consular section to ask about visa services for U.S. citizens. On both occasions, Post received a constant busy signal.

¶4. (C) We heard one amusing anecdote about the continued presence of the Russian Ambassador in Tbilisi. Ambassador Kovalenko departed with the rest of the staff on October 2. However, many were puzzled by his decision to remain in Tbilisi the entire month of September, conducting low-profile

meetings and often being spotted around town. On October 4, Georgian DFM Vashadze, who had stayed in touch with Kovalenko in September, told the Ambassador that Kovalenko had been eager to remain in Tbilisi after his Embassy had closed in order to finish up some ongoing dental work. Presumably, with his dental work completed, Kovalenko was ready to head home when the main group of diplomats departed on October 2.

TEFFT